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February 22, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 27

Sermon Title: Surrender, Love and Spirituality

Psalm 27

The Lord is my light and my salvation;

whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold[a] of my life;

of whom shall I be afraid?

2 When evildoers assail me

to devour my flesh—

my adversaries and foes—

they shall stumble and fall.

3 Though an army encamp against me,

my heart shall not fear;

though war rise up against me,

yet I will be confident.

4 One thing I asked of the Lord;

 this I seek:

to live in the house of the Lord

 all the days of my life,

to behold the beauty of the Lord,

 and to inquire in his temple.

5 For he will hide me in his shelter

 in the day of trouble;

he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;

 he will set me high on a rock.

6 Now my head is lifted up

 above my enemies all around me,

and I will offer in his tent

 sacrifices with shouts of joy;

I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

7 Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud;

 be gracious to me and answer me!

8 “Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!”

Your face, Lord, do I seek.

9 Do not hide your face from me.

Do not turn your servant away in anger,

you who have been my help.

Do not cast me off; do not forsake me,

O God of my salvation!

10 If my father and mother forsake me,

the Lord will take me up.

11 Teach me your way, O Lord,

and lead me on a level path

because of my enemies.

12 Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,

for false witnesses have risen against me,

and they are breathing out violence.

13 I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord

in the land of the living.

14 Wait for the Lord;

be strong, and let your heart take courage;

wait for the Lord!

This Is the Word of the Lord...

Prayer...

Introduction:

This morning, we are beginning our Lenten Sermon Series on the book Surrender to Love. I want us to begin by looking at the Preface of the book entitled Surrender, Love and Spirituality.

Our author David Benner is a Christians Psychologist who also has a passion for Christian Spirituality. Part of my interest in David Benner comes from my own interest in the integration of Christian faith and Psychology. For about a decade of my life, during my thirties, I worked as an Admissions Counselor at Fuller Seminary and part of my job involved supporting the recruitment and application process

for students of both the Master of Science in Marriage and Family Therapy program and the PsyD and PhD program in Clinical Psychology at Fuller. Today, I also support the Doctor of Psychology program at George Fox University as one of their spiritual directors. I meet with a couple students each year offering hourly sessions of spiritual direction.

I greatly appreciate how David Benner in his book *Surrender to Love* seeks to help his readers and clients grow in what he calls psychospiritual wholeness. It makes sense to me that what many of us need is a deep personal relationship with God that supports our spiritual, physical, and mental health. I think that is what Benner means by psychospiritual wholeness. And the word he centers on in this book is Surrender.

In the preface of our book, he gets into the heart of the issue. He wants to explore how we feel about the word surrender.

A few months ago, I was praying in the middle of the night as I often do and I felt like the Holy Spirit dropped in my heart that the key to what I am looking for in my life would be to learn to surrender. Over the next few days after that prayer, I noticed that the word surrender kept coming up. I spoke to my daughter Cate and she mentioned that surrender was a helpful guiding word in her life. I think I listened to a radio interview that brought up surrender and I visited our AA group at church to celebrate one of the leaders sobriety birthday of 20 years and I heard surrender come up multiple times at that group. The serenity prayer was spoken at the AA meeting, which you will remember says...

The Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity

to accept the things I cannot change;

courage to change the things I can;

and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;

Enjoying one moment at a time;

Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;

Taking, as He did, this sinful world

as it is, not as I would have it;

Trusting that He will make all things right

if I surrender to His Will;

That I may be reasonably happy in this life

and supremely happy with Him

Forever in the next.

Amen.

What I noticed about the serenity prayer was how much it felt like a prayer of surrender. The full prayer even includes the word surrender.

I shared about my interest in the word surrender a couple months ago in a sermon and shortly after that Nancy Backes suggested I read our Lenten book Surrender to Love.

So now we are exploring this word surrender in depth. I sense God is still telling me that surrender is a key word for me as I grow in faith, but probably like some of you here this morning, my natural tendency is not to be drawn to the word surrender.

When I hear the word surrender, I think of raising the white flag in battle or even giving up in a sports competition. I find myself worried that surrender sounds too much like submission, which feels like a dangerous word that could lead to being walked on or abused by someone. And what really hits me about the word

surrender is that it feels like giving up my power to either another person or to God.

I have resistance to this word because I struggle to trust it to be a safe word. I worry that surrender will make me overly vulnerable and that someone will take advantage of me in that vulnerability.

But David Benner does something intriguing with that word. He connects it to love. And he suggests that God is love. Therefore, to surrender to God is to ultimately to surrender to Love. Now that sounds still like vulnerability, but if God is love and is trustworthy, then maybe surrendering to Love, surrendering to God, is in many ways the key to life. As we begin our reflection on our Lenten book, I wish to highlight a quote from the preface to our book. As Benner introduces the book, he writes...

“This book is about love—not the soft, sentimental kind but the strong spirit-transforming kind. It is about the paradoxical ways we often fear love and the way love uniquely offers release from our

deepest fears. It is about the consequences of building the spiritual journey around anything else than surrender to love. And it is about knowing ourselves to be deeply loved by God as the first step in becoming great lovers of others and God.

But because the book is about love, it is also about surrender and spirituality. The interweaving of love, surrender and spirituality flows both out of the the nature of love and the nature of human beings.”

I think Benner captures well the heart of why this book is a good companion for us during Lent. In this season, we are invited on a spiritual journey of surrender to love, where we identify with Christ’s own suffering but also where we experience God’s companioning love as we prepare to celebrate deeply the grace, forgiveness, and joy offered to us in the resurrection of Jesus on Easter morning.

I chose Psalm 32 and Psalm 27 for our Scripture texts today. Our choir sang a song about forgiveness inspired by Psalm 32.

Forgiveness is one of the great gifts of a surrendered heart and

forgiveness is only received when we admit our sin and ask for grace to heal and restore us. Thankfully it is God's nature to forgive.

Psalm 27 is also about surrender. Psalm 27, a Psalm of David is a song of humility and of worship. My favorite verses of this psalm are verses 1, 4, and 5.

The Lord is my light and my salvation;

whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold[a] of my life;

of whom shall I be afraid?...

4 One thing I asked of the Lord;

this I seek:

to live in the house of the Lord

all the days of my life,

to behold the beauty of the Lord,

and to inquire in his temple.

5 For he will hide me in his shelter

in the day of trouble;

he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;

he will set me high on a rock.

Do you notice in this psalm, the modeling of surrender? The

Psalmist needs protection from God and chooses to trust that God

will save him. The Psalmist is also amazed by the beauty of God.

Like a worship leader singing praises to God, the Psalmist gazes on

the beauty of the Lord in prayer and surrenders into God's presence

of love.

My prayer for us in this Season of Lent is that we will learn that surrender can be a good word, even a safe word, when we link surrender to love as defined as God's presence. God's love is always trustworthy. Surrendering to Love is surrendering to the God who knows us so well and understands also the frailty of being human.

We do not need to pretend that we have it all together with God. We also do not need to be Lord of our own lives. Ironically, when we surrender to God who is unconditional love, we become more fully ourselves. We begin to live out of the center of our giftedness and God's calling. When we are aligned with the love of God in full surrender, we engage life not with fear but with faith, not bound by anger, but anchored in peace. A surrendered life is not bracing for a fight, but is instead opening arms ready to offer a hug both to God and others.

Of course as we surrender to Love, as we surrender to God, we seek to be led by the Holy Spirit in our actions. We will need good

boundaries to protect ourselves and others from harm, but the main goal of surrender is to free us to be led by the Holy Spirit and by our hearts desires that are good and in alignment with God's heart for us.

One thing that is true about the process of surrender is that it will invite us to choose humility over pride. David Benner like Richard Rohr and many other spirituality writers suggests that our less than healthy egos are what prevent us from experiencing more fully a close relationship with God and others. A healthy ego is able to support personal self esteem and confidence with humble love of God and others. The struggle comes when our less than healthy egos out of pride and possibly fear try to control life and choose not to surrender to God.

The good news is that we all are on a journey of surrender to Love. We rely on God's grace to help us let go and trust God, especially in times when life feels uncertain or when suffering is a daily

companion that seems to keep us burdened more than we can endure.

I hope that surrendering to Love feels like a gentle invitation, similar to resting in a warm blanket or sipping some hot tea. Surrendering to Love is like sunbathing on a beach and taking moments to look up and enjoy the beauty of the ocean and the vastness of God's love.

Like many of you, I have enjoyed the Winter Olympics the last couple of weeks. This last week, we enjoyed watching Michaela Schiffrin win gold in the slalom ski race. Before and after her race, she took time to remember her father who had passed away six years earlier. She surrendered in prayer as she also sought to connect to the presence of her father. This spiritual surrender helped Michaela ski with freedom and confidence. She still had some anxiety and doubt, but she relaxed and was able to focus on the moment. In a similar way, we saw Alyssa Liu win gold in the women's ice skating competition. Alyssa chose to surrender to the

experience of skating. She focused on enjoying herself without worrying about the outcome. She skated with joy and love for her sport and won Gold by not worrying about the future and living into the present moment as well. She also remembered her dad after her skating event. Her dad was a survivor of persecution during the time of the Tiananmen Square protests in China. Alyssa chose to be herself with her flair for fashion and freedom and surrendered to the experience. She inspired a new generation with her passion for her sport and the joy of life itself.

We may not all have the privilege of winning a medal in the Olympics, but we all can learn to surrender to God's love and find greater peace and hope on this journey of life.

May we go on this journey of surrendering to love together during this Lent. Maybe God will surprise us with deeper freedom, healing, and the gift of feeling God's love more fully in our lives.

Let us pray...